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MEMORIAL OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE VIGILANCE AND SAFETY

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Committee of Vigilance and
Memorial of the Committee of
Vigilance and Safety of the
City and Precincts of
1815.

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MEMORIAL

OF THE

COMMITTEE OF VIGILANCE AND SAFETY,

OF THE

CITY AND PRECINCTS OF BALTIMORE,

ON

THE NECESSITY OF PROVIDING AN ADEQUATE FORCE

FOR

THE PROTECTION OF THAT CITY

DURING

THE NEXT CAMPAIGN.

FEBRUARY 1, 1815.
Printed by order of the Senate of the United States.

WASHINGTON CITY:

PRINTED BY ROGER C. WEIGHTMAN.

1815.

IN SENATE

OF

THE UNITED STATES.

FEBRUARY 1, 1815.

Mr. Smith presented the following memorial, which was read, referred to the military committee, and ordered to be printed for the use of the senate:

To the president of the United States, and the senate and house of representatives of the United States of America in congress assembled: the memorial of the committee of vigilance and safety of the city and precincts of Baltimore.

Your memorialists beg leave to draw your attention to the necessity of providing a force adequate to the defence of the city of Baltimore during the next campaign, and in doing so, they would take the liberty to submit the following statement and reflections for your consideration:

Nothing has so strikingly illustrated the easy accessibility of the city of Baltimore to an invading enemy, as the demonstration made upon it during the last summer. It then appeared that large frigates, and any number of bomb vessels, could, without molestation from the shore, approach and lie within shell range of Fort M'Henry, the chief strong hold of the city; and that, unless the channels should be seasonably and effectually obstructed, they might approach within

reach of the city itself, along a prong of the Patapsco, called Ferry Branch. It also appeared, that any number of troops may with ease be landed on that long, narrow slip of land, called Patapsco Neck, the most remote point of which is about twelve miles from Baltimore, and that when landed, unless checked or repelled by an equal or superior force, they may in a very short time, be marched to the assault of any part of the city. Thus much has been clearly evinced by the late attack of the enemy. The other directions from which assaults were seriously apprehended, it might be highly imprudent to point out and explain in a paper, with the contents of which the enemy may hereafter become acquainted, and the more especially since that enemy, every where barbarous and malignant, may well be supposed to cherish a peculiarly rancorous spirit of hostility against a city from which he has been driven back with disappointment and disgrace, and to be anxiously attentive to all the means by which he may best explore every avenue to assault, and be enabled to select the weakest and most vulnerable.

The people of Baltimore, apprized of the power and temper of the enemy with whom they had to contend, have, during the last summer, exerted every means in their power to render their city as strong and as defensible as possible They hold in readiness obstructions prepared to be thrown into the channels of the river leading to the city at the shortest notice; have, chiefly by their own personal labor or contributions, caused forts, redoubts, or breastworks, to be thrown up and nearly completed under the direction of the military authority, roundabout the whole extent of the city; and they have aided, as far as in their power, in procuring and mounting the ordnance ne-

cessary and suitable to the work so erected. When those lines and forts shall be well and fully manned, Baltimore will feel perfectly secure. Its citizens may then with confidence set the enemy at defiance; but not till then.

Your memorialists deem it unnecessary to state the strength of the regular force now stationed here, because the most correct sources of information upon this subject, are at the seat of government. It is, however, confessedly very inferior, and inadequate to the defence of the city. Your memorialists have not been able to ascertain with precision, the number of men requisite for the defence of Baltimore; but from a consideration of the ease with which the city may be approached both by land and water, as manifested in the late attack; of the various points to be defended; of the reported threats and disposable force of the enemy; and also of information obtained from some of the most experienced and intelligent military characters, they are strongly impressed with a belief that a considerable permanent force of regulars is indispensable to the safety of the city. Whether such a force can be detached from the military establishment now on foot is more than your memorialists can undertake to say, but every expectation that it would be done, has thus far, been withheld from them, and they have uniformly been given to understand, that their reliance must be placed during the next campaign, as heretofore, on the militia, to be called together as occasion may require. Against such an arrangement, your memorialists, on behalf of their fellow citizens, the people of Baltimore and its precincts, must beg leave warmly to remonstrate, and most decidedly to protest. The inefficiency of militia alone for any regular or important operation of

war, has been so often and so fully tested, that it cannot now be necessary to adduce either proofs or arguments to show what has been so long and universally admitted The experience of this, as well as that of the revolutionary war, shows, that to repel the hasty predatory incursions of an enemy, militia may often be brought to act with much effect, and that they are a useful, and often powerful auxiliary force in partizan warfare; it also shows, that it would be extremely unsafe to rely upon them solely for the defence of the extensive lines of a large city against any very considerable invading regular force. An army of militia, to be equal in strength to that of a regular one, must always be vastly superior in numbers, yet however, the history of military affairs in all times has shown, that a mere mass of armed men, or undisciplined militia beyond a certain number, brings with it little or no additional strength. Taking this principle as correct, your memorialists do humbly conceive, that scarcely any militia force that could be hastily collected about their city, could secure it against a large invading army of well disciplined regulars. Your memorialists have no reason to doubt the courage of their fellow citizens composing the militia; far otherwise, they insist only, that without the combined movement, concert, and discipline, of a regular army, courage can do nothing, and numbers produce only confusion and disorder. A militia force, hastily assembled, is not only the most unsafe, it is also the most expensive. They are not, it is true, usually retained in service during a whole campaign; but being necessarily far more numerous than regulars, and infinitely more wasteful of all the munitions of war, they are in the end much more costly and burdensome. But the

exclusive use of a militia force, brings with it other evils of a nature so striking and fatal, as even if it were not liable to the charge of prodigality and insecurity might induce us to avoid it. It interrupts the pursuits of husbandry, and embarrasses every branch of industry, to the impoverishment of individuals and the ruin of the state. It draws into the field, men who are not prepared either in mind or body, for its hazards or fatigues; possessing little capacity to annoy the enemy, and yet less to endure the privations and hardships of a camp. It is known to destroy by disease, and to break down the constitutions of more than *double* the numbers of those who perish or are permanently injured by sickness in a regular army. And to augment the sum of human misery, far more than inlistments could, by diffusing more widely anxiety among families in proportion to the superior numbers of the militia force and the superior importance of the greater part of it to those who are connected with or depend upon them.

Your memorialists are aware that it may be difficult, perhaps impossible, to provide a body of regulars, enlisted upon the terms of the existing laws, in season for the defence of their city during the next campaign; but they flatter themselves that a law might be framed and passed, by virtue of which the necessary number of able bodied men might be called into the field for local, stationary, or limited service, during one campaign at the least, if not longer.

Your memorialists would here beg leave to observe, that, as among the most important of the powers of the general government, is that of the right to declare war, to the providing supplies, and all the means for its active prosecution, and the superintending its faithful and vigorous manage-

ment, are among its most sacred trusts and binding obligations The rapid and decisive movements of war, imperatively require, to insure even safety much more success, a corresponding promptitude and decision of the government by which it is waged; a war of enterprize and vigor, not only drives danger from the door of every citizen, calls forth a bold manly spirit of patriotism, and adorns the nation with rays of imperishable glory, but is also the least costly, the least wasteful of human life, the least tedious, and almost always terminates in the most sure and lasting peace. While on the other hand, the shrinking policy of bare defence, paralyzes the powers of the nation, imperceptibly wastes its resources, and invites the aggressions of an enemy. Under such impressions, it would be the earnest wish of your memorialists, that the energies of their country should be so actively and forcibly exerted as to drive their present enemy, with his barbarous system of warfare, far from their homes; but since that seems to be at present impracticable, owing to his greatly superior powers, they do therefore humbly beg and entreat, that the means for their defence may be provided by a timely and adequate exercise of the legitimate and wholesome powers of the nation. Unless the general government does, by a seasonable and vigorous effort, provide for the common defence along the Atlantic border, your memorialists are very seriously apprehensive that they will be amongst the first, and perhaps the most signal, of the victims of the ruinous policy of relying altogether upon an inefficient militia force, or of leaving every state to defend itself according to its ability. For a crisis has now arrived, when not only the city of Baltimore, but the state of Maryland itself, can only hope for protection and safety through

the powers and means of the national government. Exposed and vulnerable as Maryland is to its centre, harassed and plundered as it has been, it feels with the most lively sensibility, that it is now, indeed, wholly dependent upon the union for salvation; for alone, it is utterly unequal to the contest. The present war has, however, clearly shown, that the most potent of the states is not altogether equal to its own defence, and that one of the smallest has compelled the enemy to fly from its territory, when aided by the powers of the union. When your memorialists consider how very obvious it must be to the mind of any one who will reflect only for a moment upon the subject, that a single campaign undertaken by Maryland alone, in defence of its own shores, would not only prostrate its finances, but perhaps mortgage its resources for ages to come, without, in the end, effecting any valuable purpose, they feel inspired with the highest degree of confidence, that their national government, so eminently characterized for its impartial and liberal justice, will, with alacrity and promptitude, afford them the succor so necessary to their safety; nor do they feel less confident that there is not a single citizen of Maryland so lost to a just regard for his own best interests, as to hesitate one moment in co-operating with the general government in the lawful and vigorous exercise of those powers of conducting war, by which alone they can be protected, defended, or even saved from absolute ruin.

Your memorialists, in speaking of the merits of Baltimore, and her pretensions to the special consideration and regard of the government, feel very sensibly the delicacy and embarrassment of the undertaking. The relative commercial importance of this city is best known at the seat of go-

vernment; it will therefore be sufficient barely to refer to official documents there, by which it will appear, that in this respect it ranks as the third city of the union. But the commercial loss and ruin consequent upon the fall of Baltimore, certainly is not the only, nor is it perhaps the greatest evil to be apprehended. It is the loss of a post, the relative position of which, would be so highly advantageous to the enemy, that will produce in the mind of every impartial and thinking man the greatest alarm. The prodigious extent of country commanded by Baltimore, and the facility with which the enemy might from thence push his predatory incursions in every direction, are obvious, and may more properly be left to the reflections of government, than, under existing circumstances, be strongly urged or fully explained. Lest the people of Baltimore should be numbered among those who forget the duty of a citizen, when every man should struggle to be foremost in discharging it, your memorialists will take leave to say a few words of their patriotism; what they have to say shall be comprized in a small compass, and shall be no more than what they believe will be the award of an impartial world. The people of Baltimore have dearly earned the privilege of speaking in the most frank and unreserved terms to the representatives of the nation. Yet they feel too tenderly for the honor and welfare of their country, even if they could be so indulged, publickly to rebuke and reproach the rulers of their choice for any errors that are past; they had rather aid than weaken, applaud than condemn. Let the following unequivocal acts and sufferings speak their ardent love for their government and country:

The metropolis of the nation was threatened,—a portion of the militia of Baltimore was called on,—at a very few moment's warning, they marched with alacrity to the aid of their country;—and on the unfortunate 24th August, they were posted in front; the loss sustained by the enemy was produced, in a great degree, by its militia, and some amongst the best of its citizens bled or fell. The enemy next threatened Baltimore itself, upon which its people, old and young, of all classes, exerted themselves to the utmost, and with the most uncommon energy, in erecting works of defence, and making preparations to meet him; and by the most unremitting and indefatigable labors their city was put into a tolerable state of defence by the time he appeared before it. And the city feels great pride in the recollection that, on the day so memorable to it, the 12th September, the constancy, fortitude, and courage, of its citizens-soldiers, will bear a comparison with those of any other people on earth. Its citizens, some of whom had borne arms in their country's defence in the war of the revolution, and her youth, met the enemy in advance, and were every where the first among the foremost in every perilous encounter. The banking institutions, and the citizens of Baltimore, it is believed, have been as prompt and as liberal in their loans to the government, as those of any other portion of the union.

Such are the people for whom your memorialists beg and entreat aid, protection, and defence. The government may yet provide the means in time, if prompt and vigorous measures are adopted; but there is no time to be lost. And your memorialists cannot for a moment entertain the painful thought that the constituted authorities of their country will turn with apathy from the earnest en-

treaties of a people so highly deserving their regard, and leave them to the mercy of a brutal enemy, whose hostility against them in particular has been so lately manifested and so strongly excited.

EDWD JOHNSON,

Chairman of the committee of vigilance and safety.

Baltimore, January 26, 1815.

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